

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Zenith Engraving Company

South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Marketing Assistance Helps Zenith Re-invent Itself

Client Profile:

Zenith Engraving Company, Inc., located in Chester, South Carolina has been in business since 1961. Currently employing 98 people, the company historically made screens for rotary screen printers that produced printed fabric for the textile industry, primarily upholstery and drapery fabrics. Zenith employees purchased the company in 1999 when it was slated to be closed due to a downturn in the textile industry. Under new, innovative ownership, Zenith Engraving has increased its number of employees by about 15 percent this year with the addition of graphic designers and customer service representatives.

Situation:

The textile industry began disappearing in 1999 as consumer trends shifted away from printed fabric and toward woven, leather, and solid-dyed fabrics instead. It became apparent that in order to survive, the company must reinvent itself. Employees bought the company and shortly thereafter, embarked on a new journey using the TRANSFORM suite of services offered by the South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership (SCMEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate.

Solution:

Zenith participated in TRANSFORM strategy's no-cost competitiveness review where the management, operations and marketing efforts of the company were reviewed to determine any limiting factors. Zenith was experimenting with digital printing and believed its existing customer base would benefit from the speed that digital printing could bring to the proof-approval process. In addition, it seemed reasonable that customized short runs of digitally printed fabric would provide a cost effective alternative to conventional printing for interior design firms. The primary outcome from the assessment was confirmation that the foray into digital printing was a step in a new and exciting direction for the company and what Zenith really needed at that point was more strategic market direction. TRANSFORM Specialist Tim Sinclair then used researchers from the University of Minnesota to conduct a market study to see if high-end interior designers would be interested in their custom pillows, fabrics, etc. Specialist Rhonda Huskins provided lean manufacturing training and implementation to get Zenith on track to competitively offer customized, short runs of its apparel items. Zenith set up an e-commerce site, with the help of a designer referred by Sinclair, to sell its finished products through major retailers nationwide. Today, it has given some energy to the textile industry because the operation regularly uses cut and sew facilities to create its pillows, tote bags, and related apparel.

Results:

* Increased sales by 300 percent.

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- * Invested \$250,000 in capital improvements.
- * Added 13 new products to inventory.
- * Created 5 jobs.
- * Retained 7 jobs.

Testimonial:

"The marketing study provided by the South Carolina MEP was very useful and told us we were barking up the wrong tree. The Lean work taught us how to digitally produce one product at a time. We credit TRANSFORM services with helping us save six or seven jobs at the facility, add five new positions, and add 13 new products to our inventory. TRANSFORM specialists are an ongoing resource for us, and we have recommended them to other small companies in South Carolina."

Andy Graven, President